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SUBJECT: REGULATORY HURDLES CONTINUE TO DELAY PLACEMENT OF  
RED CRESCENT AMBULANCES IN EAST JERUSALEM

REF: OCTOBER 10 DCM MORENO EMAIL

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones; Reasons 1.4 (B and D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Regulatory roadblocks continue to delay implementation of the MOU between Magen David Adom (MDA) and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS), specifically the placement of five PRCS ambulances in East Jerusalem. MFA Director of International Organizations and Human Rights Simona Halperin told Embassy Refugee Reporting Officer on October 18 that many of the final details were falling into place. Nonetheless, regulatory requirements now appear likely to delay the final approval of the ambulances at least another week. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) On October 18, MFA Director of International Organizations and Human Rights Simona Halperin detailed a number of "minor" problems that need to be addressed in order to allow five PRCS ambulances to operate in East Jerusalem.

-- A Ministry of Health appraisal determined that the coloring of the lower half of the PRCS ambulances is wrong (it is the color for a different type of emergency vehicle) and needs to be changed.

-- PRCS staff need to complete a one week training course for Israeli certification, which Halperin said was scheduled to begin October 21.

-- The PRCS needs to provide proof of Israeli-accepted insurance for the vehicles.

-- Ministry of Transportation needs to register tests for the vehicles (such as emissions standards) that Halperin offered should only take a couple of hours.

Halperin portrayed all of these requirements as routine matters that would be fairly simple to complete, and expressed confidence that, assuming the PRCS staff completed the one week of training, the ambulances could begin operations before the end of October.

¶3. (C) Halperin subsequently reported additional requirements that have to be met. Before the Ministry of Transportation can do its technical checks, it needs to "verify the new vehicles as ambulances in Israel." After it processes the results, which Halperin said could take "a couple of days at least," would come the emissions and other technical checks. Halperin expressed doubt that these tests could begin with the new Israeli work week starting October 21, saying she had only received the previous day the customs registry and other paperwork she had previously said the GOI needed to finish clearing the vehicles. She said that she would try to schedule the first technical check for Tuesday, October 23, on the assumption that the paperwork would be complete.

14. (C) Halperin also mentioned another problem, namely how to bring the ambulances, with their Palestinian Authority license plates, into Israel for the checks. She suggested transporting the ambulances by truck, and that somebody -- namely ICRC or PRCS -- would need to pay for the shipping back and forth for each inspection. Regional RefCoord confirmed that ICRC has agreed to arrange transfer of the ambulances to Jerusalem for the required checks.

15. (C) Halperin blamed at least part of the delay up to now on the Palestinians for not sending the required documentation expeditiously, complaining that it took ten days to receive the necessary paperwork from the PRCS after the GOI had detailed the requirements. (Note: The Palestinian delay can probably be attributed to the general slowdown in work during Ramadan. Similarly, the GOI's own delay in sending the PRCS those requirements was due at least in part to the Jewish High Holidays that closed GOI offices for much of September.)

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Stennbeck Views  
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16. (C) Per Stennbeck, former Finnish Foreign Minister currently with the ICRC, briefed the DCM and a group of EU Ambassadors October 9 in Tel Aviv on the ambulance situation.

While Stennbeck said that much progress had been made on the issue, much of it thanks to Ambassador Jones' advocacy with GOI officials, he also said that the "devil is in the details" and expressed concern that GOI political will to resolve this issue was being undercut at the operational level. Stennbeck pointed to a series of bureaucratic roadblocks imposed by the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Transportation, and the IDF. Stennbeck expressed further concern that things would go badly for the Israelis at the upcoming International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent that begins November 26, and could create "political complications" for the Annapolis conference. Stennbeck added that if the ambulances were not operating at least two weeks prior to the Red Cross Conference that his report would be "brutal" on the Israelis.

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